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ROUNDTABLE ON SUDAN
September 17, 1998
-Rapporteur's Report-
Prepared by Natalie Mychajlyszyn

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The Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development (CCFPD) convened a roundtable on the topic of Sudan on 17 September 1998. The purpose of the roundtable was to exchange information and opinions from inside and outside government on events and factors in Sudan and to help inform the development of Canadian foreign policy on this matter. Participants represented a range of governmental, non-governmental and commercial interests, including DFAIT, CIDA, Oxfam, CARE Canada, Doctors without Borders, Project Plougshares, Talisman, Roll'n Oil Fields Industries Ltd. As the discussion was characterised by very divergent views about the conflict and the situation in Sudan, the recommendations which came out of the roundtable are at times contradictory. Nonetheless, there was consensus among the participants that Canada should build on its current involvement in Sudan through a strategy of constructive engagement.

BACKGROUND

The Roundtable began with background presentations from DFAIT, CIDA, CARE and Talisman about Sudan. Issues raised during these presentations included the security situation in Sudan, Canadian economic interests and humanitarian and development strategies. As was highlighted by the DFAIT presentation, Canadian policy toward Sudan has been dominated by concerns for peace and stability in the Horn of Africa, the safety of Canadians in the region, the promotion of Canadian economic interests and, especially, human rights abuses and the deterioriating humanitarian situation. These concerns reflect the guiding principles of Canadian foreign policy of security, prosperity and the promotion of Canadian values.

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Security

From the security perspective, Canada's concern is with the civil war in Sudan. More accurately, it lies with several simultaneous wars in Sudan: the war among rebels for control in the south, the war among rebels for control in the north, and the war between rebels and the central government in Khartoum. The consequences of these wars include the devastation of the northern regions, displaced persons, mass killings of civilian populations, and the risk of spill-over into neighbouring countries, such as Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea who support the rebels against the Khartoum government. Another factor affecting the security situation is the recent American bombing of the pharmaceutical factory in Sudan. This instability endangers Canadians in the region, especially those who are located outside Khartoum.

Thus, regarding the search for peace in Sudan, Canada has focused on and promoted the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) which established in an ad hoc manner in 1993 a Peace Committee on Sudan to pursue a settlement of the Sudan conflict. This IGAD Peace Committee on Sudan has been the primary avenue for pursuing peace. For two reasons, it is considered to be the best chance for peace in Sudan. First, it includes Sudan's neighbours (Uganda, Ethiopiea, Eritrea) whose acceptance of a final settlement is important to a lasting peace given their involvement in the conflict. Second, it established in 1994 a Declaration of Principles (DOP), which lists issues for discussion in the peace process, including the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict, self-determination, unity, the notion of a multi-racial/ethnic society, democracy and freedom of belief/religion.

As an indication of its support of the peace process, Canada was one of the initial core group of states (others included Italy, Norway, the UK, the Netherlands) who organised themselves as donors in 1995 to support the process. This core group later became the IGAD Partners Forum (IPF). The IPF also established a Sudan Committee of which Canada is a member. However, the IPF lacked leadership and motivation in promoting the peace process in Sudan and, therefore, has had limited effect.

At the same time, the IGAD peace process is weak in some areas and was characterised by the roundtable participants as dysfunctional on several fronts. First, its focus is limited to the conflict in the south, neglecting the national scope of the conflict in Sudan. Second, it is undertaken in a public forum with irregular meetings. Third, key actors of the conflict, especially some of the rebel groups, are excluded from the process, thereby ensuring a continuation of the conflict should an IGAD-sponsored peace settlement be reached. Fourth, some members of the IGAD (Uganda, Ethiopia, and Eritrea) support the rebel factions against the Khartoum government. Finally, the parties in IGAD themselves are without accountability.

Despite these weaknesses, the roundtable participants did not think the IGAD process should be abandoned or marginalised as it has made limited progress. After a period of inactivity, the IGAD process was revitalised in 1996; Canada contributed to this revitalisation with CIDA funding. In 1997, agreement was reached on the DOP (although established in 1994, there had been no agreement on the declaration) and an agreement in principle was reached on self-determination. Furthermore, the IGAD process clearly identifies through the DOP the necessary elements of a lasting peace. At the same time, other avenues, specifically the OAU, through which a peace settlement in Sudan has been sought have been even less effective. Likewise, the view was

expressed at the roundtable that there might be a greater potential for a settlement and stability if there was more support for the Sudanese government; despite its imperfections and its poor record on human rights, the opposition and rebel factions are not without fault in these respects either.

Canada's fundamental position in settling the Sudan conflict is the promotion of a non-military solution. At another level, it also concedes that activities such as humanitarian interventions or the pursuit of commerical interests should be undertaken with the obligation of doing no harm. Although not fully recognised, Canada's role and influence in the peace process lies in its being a guarantor of a peace settlement and as a facilitator (NOT mediator) of the settlement process.

Economic interests

Regarding the promotion of Canadian economic interests, the Canadian government has been cautious in advising Canadian companies about economic opportunities in Sudan. Although there is a great potential for development of the oil industry in Sudan (and a Canadian company has a 25% stake in one oil consortium that includes China, Malaysia and Sudanese Petroleum), economic ventures are risky and the Canadian government finds itself in a difficult position to support business activities in Sudan given its bankrupt economic framework, the unstable environment for business, the harbouring of terrorists, and Sudan's poor human rights record.

The view was also expressed by some roundtable participants that the pursuit of economic opportunities and the development of the oil industry by Canadian companies provides Canada with a foothold from which to pursue its interests for peace and stability in the region. At the same time, the development of the oil industry results in positive spin-offs such as employment, infrastructure support (roads, access to clean water), and the building of hospitals that ultimately help to diminish poverty and instability in the region, thereby contributing to a solution.

According to a contrasting view, such economic activities (and especially the development of the oil industry in Sudan, either by Canadian or companies from other countries) prolong the conflict by empowering the Khartoum government with the economic means to fund its war effort, thereby strengthening its position against the rebels and hampering progress towards peace. In other words, such activities benefit only one side in the conflict.

Human Rights, Humanitarian Assistance and Development

Human rights abuses have been widespread and include documentation of disappearances, torture, and detention. These abuses are committed by both the Khartoum government and by the rebel factions (the SPLM was especially singled out).

Discussion turned towards the question of whether humanitarian intervention contributes to the problem or alleviates it. According to one view, the benefits of humanitarian intervention (such as by CARE, Oxfam) outweigh its negative effects, which include perceivably legitimising the government in Khartoum. In contrast, there was concern that aid was being used as a weapon in the war against all parties and that humanitarian assistance was a fig leaf to hide the lack of more significant and substantial involvement by Canada and other countries with potential influence in the peace process.

On the issue of humanitarian assistance, CARE Canada noted a change in its response from development to that of humanitarian assistance given the deterioration of the situation in Sudan and consequent new priorities.

Humanitarian assistance comprises the bulk of CIDA's activities in Sudan, especially food assistance and responses to emergency appeals. This year, CIDA has provided $3.3 million in humanitarian assistance for Sudan through the OLS. In certain instances, Canada has been the earliest and largest funders of emergency response units, allowing such units to begin operations. The level of emergency funding and food aid in any year is determined by need and guarantees of delivery.

Regarding development support, CIDA stopped its bilateral development activities in Sudan in light of its human rights record. Instead, development support is carried out through CIDA's regional program for the Horn of Africa, the program support unit, and contracts for monitoring activities. In addition, CIDA's Partnership Program with NGOs and the private sector is set up to be responsive to proposals submitted by partners; however, it currently does not support any private projects in Sudan.

Otherwise, CIDA has been more generally supportive of the settlement negotiation process. CIDA has issued $2.5 million to support IGAD ($1.5 million of which targets capacity-building studies of regional projects and $35,000 supports IGAD's conflict resolution unit and shuttle diplomacy efforts.) Another $4.8 million from CIDA is managed by Oxfam-Quebec to strengthen the capacity of civil society groups in the Horn of Africa, including Sudan (although this has not yet been implemented with 2 proposals for Sudan currently under assessment). CIDA has also provided $2.5 million to the Conflict Resolution Fund of the OAU. In addition, $250,000 from the Canada Fund provides funding to local groups in Sudan to facilitate self-sufficiency at the local level, with a notional distribution of $100,000 to southern Sudan and $150,000 to northern Sudan. Funding from the Peacebuilding Fund has been provided to Project Ploughshares which focuses on the region rather than on Sudan in particular.

In general, continuation of the conflict has taken a high toll on donor resources; at the same time, the roundtable participants recognised that aid is not a solution to the conflict which is essentially a political problem. Likewise, there is not much scope for development assistance as such programs are not likely to be sustainable under current unstable circumstances.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Canada's involvement in Sudan has thus far taken place primarily in multilateral settings; while this should not be abandoned, there is scope for greater independent action and initiative on the part of Canada within these multilateral frameworks as well as bilaterally. Many of the recommendations fall under the label of "constructive engagement," i.e. engaging the Sudanese government and the rebel factions, which the participants of the roundtable were eagerly promoting. Most importantly, the roundtable participants felt that the IGAD process should not be abandoned but instead should have its expected potential restored. Finally, the next 24 months will be a crucial period for determining long-term effects of peace efforts, given that Sudan's oil revenues will become tangible at the end of this time period.

Regarding IGAD and the IGAD peace process, including the IPF, Canada should:
- promote the reconfiguration of the IGAD process from sporadic, ad hoc meetings of its members into a continuing process and take it from the public sphere into private negotiations to prevent the parties from public posturing;
- promote the comprehensiveness of its membership by including non-IGAD actors such as the IPF, opposition and rebel groups in Sudan, NGOs;
- attempt to level the playing field so that the Sudanese opposition might more effectively participate in and affect the peace process;
- engage Sudanese civil society in the peace process and search for mechanisms to allow for such engagement, including organising support for this engagement in the IPF and among other external actors;
- pursue a broader scope of the conflict for IGAD to more accurately reflect the national character of the Sudan conflict;
- transform the IGAD process and the IPF into a middle-power issue (involving Canada, Norway, Italy, the Netherlands), especially given that US policy towards Sudan is compromised and unclear and that US policy is attributed an anti-Muslim sentiment by Muslim governments in the region; furthermore, the escalated mistrust of the US in the region in light of the US bombing of the pharmaceutical factory in Sudan allows the middle powers to emerge as the natural leaders in the settlement of this conflict;
- clarify American foreign policy regarding Sudan and the region, and in the process increase the credibility of the IGAD process in the eyes of Sudan; and impress on the US that issues other than terrorism are at stake regarding Sudan, and gain US support on some of these other issues;
- take on a more activist role for itself in the IPF and openly engage Sudan and make this engagement transparent, reinforce the moderates in the Khartoum government, use its economic links, and support Sudanese civil society while remaining aware of the core group of extremists in the Sudanese government;
- use the notional deadline of 2001 (when the Sudanese government will be in a position to collect oil revenues and launch a devastating offensive against the opposition) to encourage progress by the opposition in the negotiations;
- prohibit support for the Sudanese rebels by neighbouring countries in order to pressure the opposition to settle;

Regarding the upcoming IPF mission, Canada should:
- promote the view that only middle powers attend the IPF;
- avoid an overt agenda and objectives for the IPF mission because the situation in Sudan is fluid enough and the IPF mission can at a minimum be used to simply clarify the situation;
- promote the inclusion of civil society representatives who would engage in dialogue with their counterparts in Sudan;
- promote a Canadian initiative targetting small arms in the region, and seek the support of the Sudanese Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Ministry, police;
- promote economic engagement of the right kind, and encourage humanitarian agencies to recognise that offenders of human rights are also found among the opposition groups;

Regarding other matters directly pertaining to the conflict, Canada should:
- promote the extension of the cease-fire between the Khartoum government and the SPLM beyond October, ideally even permanently, and its expansion to other actors;

- pursue international consensus on a prohibition or a moratorium on arms transfers/supplies to the region, or at the least promote greater attention to arms supplies as a factor in the conflict;
- level the playing field in a forum other than IGAD/IPF by drawing on Canada's expertise on federalism and promoting federalist structures and solutions for pluralistic societies and involve civil societies in these solutions;
- continue support of the Special Rapporteur of the UN Secretary-General with respect to resources, access, credibility in order to supplement the IGAD peace process;
- ensure that influential people, such as those involved in the Nile region, are included in negotiations and not just people who are knowledgeable;

Regarding humanitarian assistance, economic development and human rights, Canada should:
- seek the establishment of guaranteed corridors to assure humanitarian access and delivery of humanitarian assistance;
- promote the use of Canadian businesses in Sudan who have economic leverage over the Sudanese government to pressure them on their human rights record;
- promote the use of foreign direct investment and Sudan's treatment of foreign economic interests as a barometer of the Khartoum government's good behaviour;
- promote the use of human rights experts by Canadian business interests in Sudan;
- encourage NGOs and CIDA to consider assistance beyond immediate relief needs and emergency aid and attend to programs that rehabilitate all of civil society and target their post-war capacity, such as education programs, while recognising resource limitations of these agencies;
- support a study on the war economy in Sudan in order to better target humanitarian assistance flows and development programs, which CIDA would also support;
- promote economic development because it helps alleviate factors which otherwise reinforce domestic instability; a contrasting view expressed that economic development should only be pursued once a peace settlement was in place;
- encourage Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) to rationalise its assistance and coordinate policy rather than implement it;
- begin preparations for disengagement from the conflict by promoting programs and economic activities that employ Sudanese and engage them in constructive activities rather than in the conflict.